

Syllabus

Econ 323: American Economic History After 1865

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Class summary

My contact information and office hours

- Email: sebastian.ottinger@northwestern.edu
- Office hours on zoom or in-person: on request, email me.

Teaching Assistant: Gabriel Jardanovski

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Course overview The course examines the economic development of the United States from the Civil War to the present. It focuses both on long-term economic trends (like technological advances and industrialization) and the economic causes and consequences of particular events (like the Great Depression). A specific focus will be on the topics of migration, cities, and innovation, as well as on how economic historians source and use big data, and use econometrics to answer causal questions relevant to economists, economic historians, and the broader public.

There will be two lectures each week, on Tuesday and Thursday, from 2:00-3:20 pm. In these I will first provide a brief overview on each topic, and then discuss a related (and mostly recent) academic paper. These papers are mandatory reading, and you must submit 1-2 comments or questions related to each paper before the lecture (see *Readings* below). The TA will host office hours during the discussion section each Friday from 2:00-2:50 pm. This discussion section will be on zoom.

Goals of the course The course has three distinct goals. First, it will enable a deep understanding of US Economic History since 1865. A better understanding of the past can help in understanding the economy and society we live in today. Second, this class will allow you to apply the economic tools you learned in prior economics classes to what arguably is one of the best laboratories of economics: history. Lastly, the class will train your ability to read structured but complicated texts (here: academic papers in economic history), identify their core contribution, and write brief essays about these.

Prerequisites The prerequisites for the course are as follows: Pre-requisite: Students must have taken ECON 310-1 or MMSS 211-1 and ECON 281 or ECON 381-1 or MATH 386-1 or IEMS 304 or STAT 350 to successfully enroll in this course.

Readings Each week I will assign one reading related to the lectures. These will be available on the course webpage. Readings will typically be recent academic papers or review articles. There is a reading guide, available on Canvas, which can be a useful resource for helping you structure your reading time. An important note about the readings: we are going to read some academic papers, which can be complex and may include theoretical or econometric tools that you are not familiar with. Your goal in the readings should be to gain an understanding of what question the papers is trying to answer, why that question is important, the approach that the authors use, some intuitive understanding of why that approach makes sense, and the conclusions that we can ultimately draw from the results. You should also keep an eye out for key assumptions or limitations that need to be kept in mind when evaluating the results. You are not required to try to understand the more technical aspects of the theories or econometrics in the papers. As we go through the first few readings, exactly what level of insight you should gain from the readings should become clearer.

Evaluation Grading in this class will be based on class participation (15%), two written assignments (15% each), a first test (20%), and a second test (35%).

Class participation: You will need to submit 1-2 comments or questions related to each of the class readings. There will be 14 weekly readings in this course. I will count 11 of those to calculate the grade, so you can skip sending in comments for up to 3 of the readings. These “freebies” are meant to allow you to skip readings for reasons such as feeling ill, having a busy schedule in a particular week, etc. You do not need to provide excuses for these, but use them carefully so that you don’t run out. Submission will be through an online Google form ([link](#)). The class participation grade will be based on (1) submitting the questions every week and (2) asking your question in class if I call on you. Naturally, to get points for asking your question in class, you need to be in class on the day when we discuss the reading that your question relates to.

Written assignments: There will be two written assignments due during the term (see schedule below for due dates). Briefly, these assignments will be based on questions that I will provide related to the material covered in the lectures and course readings. You will typically have a choice between two or three topics. The assignments will be no more than two pages with an additional 1-2 pages allowed for any tables or figures. I will provide you with more guidance on exactly what I am looking for in the assignments and how they will be evaluated. You will be free to use any course materials that you want on the assignments, or to look up additional resources. Written assignments should be no more than two pages long, with 1.5 spacing, no smaller than 11pt font, and page margins of at least one inch on standard sized paper. You should include references for any resources used, which do not count against the two-page length limit. You can also include 1-2 pages of additional tables and figures. It is very important that you reference any sources used, and that any direct quotes are presented as such. If you make a factual claim, there should be either a reference to support that claim, or table or figure backing up the claim. The written assignments will be somewhat like longer versions of the types of short answer questions you will encounter on the tests. So, one purpose of these assignments is to provide practice that will help you prepare for the exams. For this reason, I have scheduled one of the assignments before the first test, to provide you with extra practice before that test.

Tests: The tests will consist of a mix of knowledge questions based on information from the lectures and readings, and a short-answer question similar to the written assignments. Therefore, the written assignments are good practice for the exams, which is why I have scheduled one of them before the midterm. These tests will be in-person and take place during the lecture. It is not feasible for me to offer make-up exams if you have to miss an exam due to a documented health condition. If you have to miss the first test due to a documented illness, then you will be excused from that exam and the first test grade weight will be redistributed to the second test. If you have to miss the second test, you will get an incomplete in the course. You can then make up the missing exam by providing a research paper of 15 pages (following the formatting guidelines for the written assignments, with 5 additional pages allowed for references, tables, and figures) on a prompt that I will provide due no later than the start of the reading week in the following term.

Key dates

- March 31: First lecture
- April 14: Assignment 1 Due
- April 28: First Test
- May 12: Assignment 2 Due
- May 26: Second Test

Class policies

Academic integrity Academic integrity is very important in this class. On both tests, you are not allowed to discuss the assignment with other students or to seek help from any other individuals, nor are you allowed to consult your notes, the lecture slides, or any other resources.

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, “Academic Integrity at North- western University: A Basic Guide”, available for download here: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

Accommodations Northwestern University, and this professor, are committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university’s established accommodation process (email to accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; phone: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Northwestern COVID-19 Classroom Expectations and Policies Students, faculty, and staff must comply with University expectations regarding appropriate classroom behavior, including those outlined below and in the COVID-19 Code of Conduct. With respect to classroom procedures, this includes:

- Policies regarding masking and social distancing evolve as the public health situation changes. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with current masking, testing, Symptom Tracking, and social distancing requirements.
- In some classes, masking and/or social distancing may be required as a result of an Americans with Disabilities Act accommodation for the instructor or a student in the class even when not generally required on campus. In such cases, the instructor will notify the class.
- No food is allowed inside classrooms. Drinks are permitted, but please keep your face covering on and use a straw.
- Faculty may assign seats in some classes to help facilitate contact tracing in the event that a student tests positive for COVID-19. Students must sit in their assigned seats.

If a student fails to comply with the COVID-19 Code of Conduct or other University expectations related to COVID-19, the instructor may ask the student to leave the class. The instructor is asked to report the incident to the Office of Community Standards for additional follow-up.

Northwestern COVID-19 Testing Compliance Policies To protect the health of our community, Northwestern University requires unvaccinated students who are in on-campus programs to be tested for COVID-19 twice per week. Students who fail to comply with current or future COVID-19 testing protocols will be referred to the Office of Community standards to face disciplinary action, including escalation up to restriction from campus and suspension.

Exceptions to Class Modality Class sessions for this course will occur in person. Individual students will not be granted permission to attend remotely except as the result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation as determined by AccessibleNU. Maintaining the health of the community remains our priority. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID do not attend class and update your Symptom Tracker application right away to connect with Northwestern’s Case Management Team for guidance on next steps. Also contact the instructor as soon as possible to arrange to complete coursework. Students who experience a personal emergency should contact the instructor as soon as possible to arrange to complete coursework. Should public health recommendations prevent in person class from being held on a given day, the instructor or the university will notify students.

Class Recordings Portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter *on request*. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

Northwestern Policy Regarding Recording of Class Sessions Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings - including distributing or posting them - is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials - including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures, lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

Mobile Phone Policy Mobile phones should have the ringer turned off and be placed in pockets or backpacks. Students may not make or receive phone calls, surf the web, or send or receive text messages during class.

Laptop Computer Policy Except in the case of proven medical necessity, students may not use a laptop computer or computer tablet during the lectures. Such devices must remain in your bag and may not be placed on your desk.

Academic and other support NUHelp: Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website and app: <https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/>

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

- <https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>
- <https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>
- <https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>

Absences Students who are absent due to sickness or a positive Covid-19 test should do their best to continue to follow the course through the available course recordings and posted lecture slides. Absences due to illness should be documented. Students will be excused from in-class participation but should do their best to still send in comments about the readings. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time because of an illness, you should discuss with the instructor whether it is possible to get a short extension or whether you can be excused from the assignment with the grade weight distributed to other class elements.

Class structure

List of topics, dates, and readings (subject to adjustment):

- **March 31:** Introduction
- **April 5:** American Economic Growth in the Long Run
 - Paper Discussion: Wright, G., 1990. The Origins of American Industrial Success, 1879-1940. *The American Economic Review*, pp.651-668.
- **April 7:** Railroads and American Economic Growth
 - Paper Discussion: Donaldson, D. and Hornbeck, R., 2016. Railroads and American Economic Growth: A “Market Access” Approach. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(2), pp.799-858.
- **April 12:** Agriculture and the Settlement of the West
 - Paper Discussion: Bazzi, S. et al., 2020. Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of “Rugged Individualism” in the United States. *Econometrica*, 88(6), pp.2329-2368
- **April 14:** The Rise of the Factory and the Modern Cooperation
 - Paper Discussion: Atack, J. et al., 2019. “Automation” of Manufacturing in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Hand and Machine Labor Study. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(2), pp.51-70.
 - **Assignment 1 Due**
- **April 19:** The Second Industrial Revolution and Innovation
 - Paper Discussion: Sarada, S. et al., 2019. Changes in the Demographics of American Inventors, 1870–1940. *Explorations in Economic History*.
- **April 21:** The Economic Effects of the Civil War and Post-Reconstruction
 - Paper Discussion: Logan, T.D., 2020. Do Black Politicians Matter? Evidence from Reconstruction. *The Journal of Economic History*, 80(1), pp.1-37.
- **April 26:** The Great Migration
 - Paper Discussion: Collins, W.J. and Wanamaker, M.H., 2014. Selection and Economic Gains in the Great Migration of African Americans: New Evidence from Linked Census Data. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 6(1), pp.220-52.
- **April 28:** **First Test**
- **May 3:** The Age of Mass Migration
 - Paper Discussion: Abramitzky, R. et al., 2012. Europe’s Tired, Poor, Huddled Masses: Self-selection and Economic Outcomes in the Age of Mass Migration. *American Economic Review*, 102(5), pp.1832-56.
- **May 5:** Immigration’s Effect on the US Economy
 - Paper Discussion: Tabellini, M., 2020. Gifts of the Immigrants, Woes of the Natives: Lessons from the Age of Mass Migration. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 87(1), pp.454-486.
- **May 10:** Education and the Changing Role of Women and Children
 - Paper Discussion: Lleras-Muney, A., 2002. Were Compulsory Attendance and Child Labor Laws effective? An Analysis from 1915 to 1939. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, 45(2), pp.401-435

- **May 12:** Cities and Segregation
 - Paper Discussion: Shertzer, A. and Walsh, R.P., 2019. Racial Sorting and the Emergence of Segregation in American Cities. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 101(3), pp.415-427.
 - **Assignment 2 Due**
- **May 17:** WWI, the Interwar Period and the Great Depression
 - Paper Discussion: Fouka, V., 2020. Backlash: The Unintended Effects of Language Prohibition in US Schools after World War I. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 87(1), pp.204-239.
- **May 19:** The New Deal and WWII
 - Paper Discussion: Moser, P. et al., 2014. German Jewish Emigrés and US Invention. *American Economic Review*, 104(10), pp.3222-55.
- **May 24:** Economic and Social Trends after WW II, Recap & Question Session
 - Paper Discussion: Song, X. et al., 2020. Long-term Decline in Intergenerational Mobility in the United States since the 1850s. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(1), pp.251-258.
- **May 26: Second Test**